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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Central Intelligence Bulletin

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21 April 1970

State Dept. review completed

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Approved For Release 2003/05/29 : CIA-RDP79T00975A016000110001-1

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No. 0095/70
21 April 1970

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Indochina: The Vietnamese Communists are keeping their options open on France's recent proposal for talks on Indochina.

Madame Binh, the South Vietnamese Communist "foreign minister," told newsmen in Paris yesterday that because of US "aggression" in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, the French proposal, "in these circumstances, could not contribute to settling these problems." She added, "We think that if the French Government wants to contribute to bring back peace to Indochina, it should contribute to putting an end to the US aggression, and to guaranteeing their rights to the people of Indochina."

Madame Binh's statement, however, falls short of outright rejection of the French initiative. It more or less parallels Soviet Ambassador Malik's recent "clarification" of his 16 April endorsement of the idea of new talks in Geneva. The day after he took pains to give new life to the notion, Malik backtracked somewhat to a more familiar, harder-line Communist stance. Moscow's caution can be seen in the fact that its media have carried not a word concerning Malik's recent remarks.

As for the Vietnamese Communists, the balance of the evidence suggests that they are still trying to see what opportunities they can create for themselves by encouraging political and diplomatic activity on Indochina as a whole, but that they are unwilling at this point fully to endorse the idea of a conference. Hanoi probably believes at the moment that a more cautious approach lets it maneuver more freely. Furthermore, the early convening of another Geneva-type conference would pose problems which the Vietnamese Communists would, for the time being, prefer to avoid.

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South Vietnam: The Thieu government is belatedly trying to ease political tension by adopting a more conciliatory line toward discontented groups.

The military tribunal that began trying 11 students yesterday on charges of treason has suspended the trial until the Supreme Court can rule on the tribunal's jurisdiction in the case. Ten other students accused of disturbing public order were provisionally released by the military court.

The use of this tribunal to try civilians in national security cases has been a major irritant, especially since the treason trial of assembly member Chau, and the postponement appears to have been at government instruction. Although some students may be mollified for the time being, militant leaders may be encouraged to intensify their demands that the accused be tried by a civil court.

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Two weeks ago, the government was able to halt demonstrations by disabled veterans by seeking quick action in the National Assembly to provide improved veterans' benefits.

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Japan - Communist China: The Sato government is unconcerned by the sharp attacks made on it by the Chinese in connection with the signing of this year's memorandum trade agreement.

The government views the critical language of the joint communique on the semiofficial trade agreement, which was negotiated by the ruling conservative party's pro-China wing, as a small price for continuing the agreement. Widespread popular sentiment in Japan for improving relations with Communist China makes the agreement, which covers only about 12 percent of the annual trade between the two countries, more important politically than economically to the Sato government. Failure to renew it would have exposed Sato to strong criticism from rivals within his party as well from the media and the public.

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Peking's sharp attacks in the communique on the Sato government are a continuation of the heavy propaganda assault launched after the signing of the US-Japanese communique on Okinawa last fall. Tokyo has continued to play down these attacks by pointing to growing Japan-China trade as the most accurate indicator of relations between the two countries.

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Hungary: The Kadar regime has moved forward with some of its proposals for modernizing the nation's political structure.

A joint meeting of the council of ministers and central committee on 16 April approved drafts of a new law on local councils and a proposal to change the electoral system. The draft on local government will be sent for approval by the party congress later this year, prior to enactment into law. The new electoral law could be passed by parliament at any time.

If adequately implemented, the party leadership's recommendations on decentralization of state authority to local councils could significantly enliven the long-dormant state of local political activity. The party has proposed that the political and economic authority of the local councils be expanded so they can begin to assume "all tasks which can be purposefully resolved locally."

Moreover, the party intends to give these councils power to elect their immediate superiors at the county level, a suggestion reflecting a desire to protect councilmen from unnecessary interference from above. It is clear from the wording of the draft, however, that the party through its separate and centralized bureaucracy intends to retain overall authority in matters it deems of importance.

Proposed changes in the electoral system will actually involve further expansion of the multiple candidate experiment which failed to generate any excitement during the general elections in 1966. This time, the party seems to be proposing that some unspecified measures be taken to ensure equal opportunity for all candidates, not just those endorsed by party organizations as in the past.

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Laos: The military situation in the Long Tieng area remains quiet. A government patrol has spotted enemy forces carrying long-range rockets into an area five miles northeast of Vang Pao's headquarters, however, suggesting that the enemy may increase rocket attacks against the base airstrip. Such tactics are aimed at disrupting vital air resupply operations.

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Canada: The parliament and press continue to support overwhelmingly the government's Arctic pollution control legislation, which will come up for a vote on Wednesday. Spokesmen for the major opposition party, while supporting the bill, are complaining that the government did not go far enough toward establishing Canadian sovereignty over all waters of the Arctic archipelago. Leaders of the anti-US New Democratic Party are suggesting a unanimous vote in favor of the bill. One of Canada's most influential newspapers, the Toronto Globe and Mail, has stressed that Canadians should prepare for a general separation from the US on this and other issues. Trudeau's nationalistic stand may well help his Liberal Party in the Quebec election on 29 April.

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East Germany: The 1.9 million members and candidate members of the Communist Party will undergo an examination of their political attitudes and performance during an exchange of party cards from 1 September to 31 October. Party First Secretary Walter Ulbricht termed the exchange "normal" since most party cards will expire this year. The interview with Ulbricht published in the main party daily, Neues Deutschland, did not indicate that a major purge of party ranks is contemplated. Ulbricht stressed, however, that in the 1970s the party will require people with a high level of ideological commitment who can solve East Germany's increasingly complicated economic difficulties.

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Colombia: Demonstrations in the capital in favor of presidential candidate Rojas Pinilla were broken up by troops yesterday, but there is a possibility of further disturbances. Rojas' followers fear the government is manipulating Sunday's election returns in favor of National Front candidate Misael Pastrana who, according to preliminary figures, leads by a slim margin; the final tally may not be available before Sunday. Although there have only been minor incidents thus far, the government may declare a state of siege in an effort to prevent further disorders.

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Cuba: The extensive campaign to produce ten million tons of sugar by 15 July is now two weeks behind schedule. Output has reached six million tons, but even recent production rates probably cannot be maintained much longer. Milling yields, which are close to their peak, will begin to decline soon. Moreover, the spring rains that normally begin in May will reduce the volume of cane harvested.

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UN - South-West Africa: The special Security Council subcommittee on South-West Africa has decided that it will be unable to meet the 30 April deadline for submission of its report to the Council. Few UN members have replied so far to the subcommittee's request for information on their activities involving South-West Africa. The subcommittee is expected to ask the Council for an extension of its mandate to the end of June in order to allow time for more replies. To date there has been virtually no progress in the subcommittee toward developing a consensus on possible courses of action the UN might adopt to deal with South Africa's continuing refusal to withdraw from South-West Africa.

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